



MAS 310

Non Fiction Writing: Telling True Stories

S1 Day 2013

Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Unit Convenor

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Credit points

3

Prerequisites

CUL240 and (MAS210 or MAS211)

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

In this unit we look at techniques and structures writers use to engage ever-more fickle audiences. Key readings are drawn from a number of platforms – books, feature articles, blogs, graphic novels, indie publishing – to exemplify some of the more dynamic and engaging recent trends in quality non-fiction writing. We focus in particular on new and novel ways of approaching the past – historical events, family sagas, crimes, eccentric and little known phenomena – and on new modes of writing about science, technology and social change. We consider too the emergence of the celebrity non-fiction author. Students are guided to find and develop their own original stories, and produce pieces of quality writing, suitable for print or broadcast.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

An increased ability to write lucid, entertaining, original and truthful non-fiction prose, intended for a general readership

Ability to demonstrate research skills to the level expected of a professional writers, in particular the skills of interviewing and retrieving sound and reliable information from archives and other data repositories.

The ability to produce a quality first draft of a non-fiction, general readership feature article, and the editorial skills needed to rework and restructure that draft to the point that it becomes an acceptable final version.

An aesthetic and historical understanding of contemporary literary non-fiction writing practice.

Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression

A more sophisticated understanding of and ability to recognise inept, lazy and dishonest writing practice, and the capacity to heed editorial advice.

The willingness and ability to experiment with writing form and style

The capacity to reflect knowledgeably on the ethical issues and methodological debates surrounding contemporary non-fiction writing and journalism

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Due
<u>Weekly writing exercises</u>	10%	Continuing
<u>Pop quizzes</u>	30%	Continuing
<u>Assignment stage 1</u>	30%	2pm 12 April
<u>Assignment stage 2</u>	30%	2pm 10 June

Weekly writing exercises

Due: **Continuing**

Weighting: **10%**

The weekly writing workshops are the practical core of this course, so it is essential that they be done and brought along in suitable form each week. Each week's exercise must be typed (double-spaced), and you must bring 8 copies to your tutorial for workshopping. Individual tutors may substitute other exercises. (Feel free to suggest alternatives).

Exercises will be collected by your tutor and handed back at intervals later in the semester. As these exercises are works-in-progress, primarily intended for in-class workshopping and discussion, *they will be only minimally corrected and annotated by your tutor.*

A schedule of weekly exercises will be handed out in week 1. Word length is up to you, but generally, *shorter is better* – about 200 words for each exercise. (400 absolute max)

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- Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression
- A more sophisticated understanding of and ability to recognise inept, lazy and dishonest writing practice, and the capacity to heed editorial advice.
- The willingness and ability to experiment with writing form and style

Pop quizzes

Due: **Continuing**

Weighting: **30%**

Over the course of the semester there will be 3 tutorial 'pop quizzes' – ie unannounced.

These quizzes will be completed in the weekly workshop. Students will be asked to write about that week's lecture and set readings. Obviously a formal essay is not called for here, but rather, you will be asked to survey readings and lecture content – or aspects of those which you may choose – and synthesise them as best you can. These pop quiz reflective responses will be marked with special regard to:

- Evidence that you have *thoroughly* read the readings for that week. (NB: A quick skim-read won't suffice.)
- Attended the lecture and *attended to* the content of the lecture
- Attempted to 'join the dots' – that is, to bring the material together in ways which may or may not have been already explicitly discussed. Find and describe links between the various readings and ideas touched on in lectures. This is where you may bring your own thoughts, reflections, creativity and nascent ideas into play. You may also attempt to identify larger themes emerging over successive weeks, or even themes and memes which form across different units you are doing or have done. Expressing opinions and insights – even (especially) incomplete or not yet fully formed ideas – is a core part of the creative process. But, obviously, shallow 'knee-jerk' responses, which come more from unexamined prejudice than from open-minded or creative reflection will not be rewarded. 'Reflection' is the key here.

The purpose of this task is to help you focus on the lectures and the readings, to help you grow as a thoughtful reader of quality writing and to help foster in you an 'insider', professional understanding of writing craft. Your responses must be written in continuous prose (not point

form), but the writing style and voice is entirely up to you. These are not essays, so no bibliography is required.

Special note: if you miss a pop quiz because you failed to attend a workshop you will not be offered a chance to 'make up' the assessment *unless* you can make a strong case backed up by medical certificates etc. If you are offered a 'make-up' assessment, this, as a matter of equity with other students, will be assessed at a rigorous level.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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- The capacity to reflect knowledgeably on the ethical issues and methodological debates surrounding contemporary non-fiction writing and journalism

Assignment stage 1

Due: **2pm 12 April**

Weighting: **30%**

For your major written assignment you will be required to produce a piece of entertaining, interesting and well-researched non-fiction writing. The actual topic will be up to you, but must be in line with the types of writing investigated in this unit. Tutors will be able to offer suggestions if needed. A detailed assignment brief will be handed out early in the semester.

The assignment is in two stages. For stage one, you will need to submit a written 'pitch' of your final assignment: a piece of continuous prose writing (ie, not bullet points, research notes or report form etc) which outlines the broad topic, core idea or possible 'angle' for your major written article. This should not be more than 3 pages in length, but should reflect solid footwork and initial research, discussion, thought etc.

Your tutor will read it, discuss it with you. He/she will help you refine your angle. Heed her/his suggestions, then proceed with Stage 2:

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particular the skills of interviewing and retrieving sound and reliable information from archives and other data repositories.

- The ability to produce a quality first draft of a non-fiction, general readership feature article, and the editorial skills needed to rework and restructure that draft to the point that it becomes an acceptable final version.
- Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression
- A more sophisticated understanding of and ability to recognise inept, lazy and dishonest writing practice, and the capacity to heed editorial advice.
- The capacity to reflect knowledgeably on the ethical issues and methodological debates surrounding contemporary non-fiction writing and journalism

Assignment stage 2

Due: **2pm 10 June**

Weighting: **30%**

Finished article, suitable for publication in a reputable newspaper, journal, magazine, website or other publication aimed at general – ie non-specialist – readership.

Stage 2 involves revising and refining, turning your idea and your diligent research into a piece of good writing. In the second half of the semester students will workshop their assignments-in-progress in class.

Stage two should not be more than 2500 words in length

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- The ability to produce a quality first draft of a non-fiction, general readership feature article, and the editorial skills needed to rework and restructure that draft to the point that it becomes an acceptable final version.
- Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression

Delivery and Resources

What has changed?

MAS310 has been reworked for session 2013 to focus more closely on writing and narrative structure. This year's program includes new sections on sports writing and the graphic novel.

Assessments have been modified to include three pop quizzes.

Unit Schedule

Week 1	26 February. Peter Doyle Narrative shapes. Considering structure Some broad principles; a foreshadowing of the lecture and workshop format. No tutes this week.
Week 2	5 March. Peter Doyle 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' Evoking other times, other people, other places, other things.
Week 3	12 March. Peter Doyle. Another take on voice and point of view. Some more on structure. Who's speaking? Where is the "I", <i>who</i> is the "I"? How does a writer decide what's too much or too little first person?
Week 4	19 March. Peter Doyle What do we talk about when we talk about sport? A look at sports writing.
Week 5	26 March. Reading week. No lecture or workshops this week, but students are invited to meet with convenors and/or tutors for one-to-one consultations

Week 6	<p>2 April. Guest lecture – Pat Grant.</p> <p>Comics and graphic storytelling. Pat Grant talks about narrative plotting and explication in the graphic novel medium. Students will be invited to consider how storytelling structures and devices might be adapted and translated from one medium to another.</p>
Week 7	<p>9 April. 7 May. Guest lecture – Vanessa Berry.</p> <p>Getting ideas, following through.</p> <p>In this lecture Vanessa talks about balancing the personal with other story elements and with the practical demands of writing. She looks at how the personal can lead you <i>to</i> stories and lead you <i>through</i> stories, ie through processes of observation, background research and writing.</p>
Week 8	<p>30 April. Guest lecture — Ray Devitt</p> <p>Advanced writing tips for beginners</p> <p>Ray Devitt delivers some hard-learned tricks of the story-telling trade.</p>
Week 9	<p>7 May. Techno-hipsters and telling the near future.</p> <p>This week we look at the recent waves of popular writings on the near-future and on technological change.</p>
Week 10	<p>14 May. Peter Doyle.</p> <p>Lies, vows, curses, blessings and confessions.</p> <p>Various tried and true forms and story shapes have emerged over many years “quality” non-fiction writing and publishing, and successful pro-writers need to learn mastery of these. But the tradition is equally dependent on radical departures from form, on experimentation, on shock and surprise. In this lecture we discuss some potent but less used tricks of the trade, involving time and compression, prediction and surprise; we look at some of the creative liberties writers take with truth and deliberate falsehood. Students will be invited to try experimenting with some of these techniques in their own writing.</p>

Week 11	21 May. Sydney Writers Festival. No lecture or formal tutes this week, but instead, MAS310 students attend the Sydney Writers Festival. (At least two sessions.)
Week 12	28 May. “Previously on Telling True Stories...” We review and revisit the material covered so far. We draw out and clarify, discuss.
Week 13	4 June. Individual consultations. No lecture.

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Special Consideration Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of Academic Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at: <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

UniWISE provides:

- Online learning resources and academic skills workshops http://www.students.mq.edu.au/support/learning_skills/
- Personal assistance with your learning & study related questions.
- The Learning Help Desk is located in the Library foyer (level 2).
- Online and on-campus orientation events run by Mentors@Macquarie.

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

Details of these services can be accessed at <http://www.student.mq.edu.au/ses/>.

IT Help

If you wish to receive IT help, we would be glad to assist you at <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the university's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students and it outlines what can be done.

Graduate Capabilities

Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Ability to demonstrate research skills to the level expected of a professional writers, in particular the skills of interviewing and retrieving sound and reliable information from archives and other data repositories.
- The ability to produce a quality first draft of a non-fiction, general readership feature article, and the editorial skills needed to rework and restructure that draft to the point that it becomes an acceptable final version.
- The capacity to reflect knowledgeably on the ethical issues and methodological debates surrounding contemporary non-fiction writing and journalism

Assessment tasks

- Weekly writing exercises
- Assignment stage 2

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue

knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- An aesthetic and historical understanding of contemporary literary non-fiction writing practice.
- Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression
- The willingness and ability to experiment with writing form and style

Assessment tasks

- Weekly writing exercises
- Pop quizzes

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

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expression

- A more sophisticated understanding of and ability to recognise inept, lazy and dishonest writing practice, and the capacity to heed editorial advice.

Assessment tasks

- Weekly writing exercises
- Pop quizzes
- Assignment stage 1
- Assignment stage 2

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Ability to demonstrate research skills to the level expected of a professional writers, in particular the skills of interviewing and retrieving sound and reliable information from archives and other data repositories.
- Advanced level recognition of quality and excellence in sentence- and paragraph-level expression
- A more sophisticated understanding of and ability to recognise inept, lazy and dishonest writing practice, and the capacity to heed editorial advice.
- The willingness and ability to experiment with writing form and style

Assessment tasks

- Pop quizzes
- Assignment stage 2

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Ability to demonstrate research skills to the level expected of a professional writers, in particular the skills of interviewing and retrieving sound and reliable information from archives and other data repositories.
- The ability to produce a quality first draft of a non-fiction, general readership feature article, and the editorial skills needed to rework and restructure that draft to the point that it becomes an acceptable final version.

Assessment tasks

- Pop quizzes
- Assignment stage 1
- Assignment stage 2

Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens

As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation's historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- The capacity to reflect knowledgeably on the ethical issues and methodological debates surrounding contemporary non-fiction writing and journalism

Assessment task

- Assignment stage 2